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ABSTRACT

A discussion of biliteracy development for Latino adolescents and young adults in the public schools focuses on the situation in one high school, examining its dynamics, tensions, and possibilities. It is found that while the students in question are often over 16 and taught in high school, they are surrounded by the conceptions, orientations, and relations of an academic setting that has little or no use for lived experience, for linguistic and cultural difference, or for students who do not fit the age-specific standards of literate and intellectual performance. This is in contrast to the approaches of most adult education programs. In this context, knowledge is viewed as separate from the real world and community, with instruction simply emphasizing what students do not know. Instructional approaches used to encourage students to talk, theorize, and write about the contexts and content of their lives in and out of school are examined. The focus of the instructional activities was the creation of a photonovel about a teenage boy's problems. A brief bibliography is included. Some instructional materials and the final project are appended. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THEIR OWN LEARNING: LITERACY, LANGUAGE, AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION WITH LATINO ADOLESCENTS

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I want to begin by posing a series of questions that generally underlie the book's theme, "Biliteracy: Theory and Practice", and specifically frame the substance of my Chapter. The questions are not necessarily new --- they are ones that theoreticians and practicioners from a variety of ideological leanings have probably asked before. My intent in raising them here is not to afford nor to even suggest definitive answers. Rather, it is to illuminate through the discourse I use in posing and discussing them, the tentative, speculative, complex, and shifting nature of work in and about literacy for language minority populations. Reflected in the questions is my own ongoing struggle to both understand and to understand how I understand literacy theory and practice and the bilingual students, communities, and contexts that I study, speak and write about, work with, and learn from. The questions are as follows:

- *What is literacy?
- *What is knowledge?
- *And, what is the relation between both?
- *What does this relation suggest for classroom practice?
- *What are the conditions that limit, restrict, or enable access to literacy and knowledge?
- *Are these the same for all populations?
- *Who are the students and communities that are the "subjects" of our work?
- *In what ways do society, schools, and/or programs define and thus position "them"?
- *Are our understandings similar or different?
- *And what about the students and communities themselves--- how do they perceive and describe their own realities, conditions, and subjectivities?

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*Similarly, how do we interpret these individuals educational, linguistic, and literacy needs and experiences?
*What are their own interpretations?

While numerous issues, concerns, perspectives, and experiences are probably brought to mind in pondering these queries, the context for my own analysis and discussion is partially revealed by the spoken words of a 19 year old Latino high school student from the Boston area who told me about his experience with literacy, the English language, and formal education.

> The school, yeah, I guess that's where you could say they taught me to read. But it's on the street that I really learned English...The problem is the reading and writing, it don't do me no good 'cause I say and write words but when I try and read the book in them classes I don't understand nothin. Sometimes I think they do it to hold us back... You know, to make sure "los hispanos" don't make it...

This student's brief statement reveals alot about [bi]literacy, knowledge, and school instruction, about issues of access and control, and about students' awareness of and ability to speak about their lived realities and the ways schools have failed them. Although this student graduated from high school several months after he talked to me, many of his peers were retained for the second, third, or even fourth time. Some were referred for special education while others kept on in the bilingual program with the same classes and with the same teachers as the year before. The dropout rate for Latinos in the community at the time was around 70 percent. The reasons for dropping out were obviously not attributable to literacy per se. Yet, if one were to assess the literacy abilities of those retained, referred, or who had left school, chances are high that a large percentage lacked the reading, writing, and comprehension required and expected. In fact,

assumptions among teachers and administrators were that high school students should be able to read and write; if they could not it certainly was not part of a high school teacher's job to teach them.

As in many cities throughout the country, a growing number of adolescents and young adults in this Boston area community lack the literacy-related abilities to succeed in traditional bilingual and monolingual programs. Some come from rural areas of Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, or Central America and have had limited access to formal schooling. Others have been in and out of schools for years, subjected to inappropriate or inconsistent instructional approaches, and/or bounced between a number of linguistic, cultural, social, and educational environments. Most probably fit the profile of adult literacy students --- unable to gain or produce meaning through print in English or the native language. Many [illegible] over the age of 16 and have adult responsibilities. [illegible] because they are enrolled in a high school, the majority [illegible] until just recently, been afforded minimal if any access to [illegible] learning and, as a result, to other academic content [illegible]on. While the desire to read and write, learn English, and [illegible]re the stated reasons why many keep coming to school, [illegible]nal attitudes, policies, practices, programs, and [illegible] work to both limit and position this acquisition; [illegible] not given the opportunity to develop the literacy [illegible]red for further learning (in Spanish or in English) [illegible] most part, see little relation between what they are [illegible]al life existence. Moreover, the natural and dynamic

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bilingualism that frames many of these students' identities and interactions, that is, the communicative varieties and standard and nonstandard forms of Spanish and English as well as Spanish/English codeswitching, is not only ignored but generally forbidden in formal instruction. In other words, students are told to speak and to write in one language or the other, emphasis is on the "correct" standard (which may vary greatly from the language students speak) and preference is always for English. This discordant reality seems to have a lot to do with the way literacy, knowledge, and schooling are traditionally understood in our society, with dominant and subordinate relations of power, as well as with the rationality that typically underlies mainstream approaches to instruction.

This Chapter explores these issues from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. It examines the definitions and conceptions that shape and direct instructional practice and programmatic design and it discusses the differential understandings of administrators, teachers, and students from a Boston area high school, which for purposes of confidentiality I will call City High, as to what these practices and designs offer. In this discussion, I refer back to the questions posed earlier. I also theorize about my own understandings and interpretations of what, as researcher/practioner, I am seeing, reading, and hearing.

Finally, the paper analyses the pedagogical approaches I used to encourage Latino adolescents and young adults with limited school-based literacy skills to talk, to theorize, and to write about the contexts and contents of their lives in and out of school, and about how their education could be more relevant and

better directed. The significance of these approaches for [bi]literacy development and knowledge production as well as for self esteem and academic and social engagement is made clear through examples of their own dialogues, analyses, and written products. Further made evident is the psychosocial significance of dual language (L1/L2) literacy promotion.

Literacy, Knowledge, and Schooling: Dominant Perspectives

Literacy has long been considered the basis for higher order, analytical thought and the gateway into material success in industrialized capitalist societies. While numerous studies have exposed this notion as mythical in real life (e.g., Graff, 1987; Walsh, 1991), educational institutions generally continue to maintain and promote the literacy and success relation. Public school students are told that [English] reading and writing skills (and a high school diploma) are essential for employment. Yet, little or no opportunity is provided for students (particularly poor students for whom standard English is a second language) to develop literacy after primary school. In fact, the acquisition and imparting of literacy (at least in the context of Western "developed" societies) is "naturally" associated with the early school years; those who do not become literate as children are deemed deficient, backward, problematic, and "less intelligent." A school administrator's comments make evident this understanding:

> Those Hispanic students, the ones that can't even read and write, you know, they don't really know how to think either. Their parents are the same way. Why do you think they're on welfare, unemployed, always in trouble?...We do what we can, that is, for the majority in this school. Those kids, they don't belong here, in this building anyway.

When literacy instruction is provided for these high school students in need, it generally assumes an elementary substance and orientation. A worksheet from a Boston high school ESL literacy teacher's classroom offers an example (see Appendix 1).

Some students classified as lacking literacy skills arrive to the U.S. with limited formal schooling, a significant proportion of students pass through U.S. primary schools without acquiring the literacy supposedly imparted. In 1988, 56 percent of Latino 17 year-olds and 47 percent of African Americans were classified as functionally illiterate compared to 13 percent of whites (Fueyo, 1988). Latino students are also much more likely than whites to have low academic achievement, be retained in grade, and enter high school overage (HPDP, 1988). Educators often name them "at risk" and blame them for the "crisis" in education. Yet, as urban schools increasingly become a majority "minority, school officials are faced with the fact that the "at risk" categorization fits most of the student body. What does this say about the U.S. educational system in general, and about equality and access in particular?

Research has demonstrated that instructional approaches, ability groupings, choice of texts, language use, contextual situations, and cultural and experiential inclusions and exclusions, among other things, work to differentially control and position literacy development (e.g., Cummins, 1986; Goodman, in press; Roth, 1984; Shannon, 1989; Walsh 1991a). But even for those who become literate, promise of economic success is still limited by race/ethnicity, class, and gender. Dropouts from wealthy neighborhoods for example, are much more likely to find jobs than

male graduates from poor neighborhoods (Fine, 1987). And high school and college diploma wielding women of color, when they find jobs, continue to be the lowest paid and most underemployed segment of the work force. Literacy, in and of itself, presents no monetary assurances nor hope for a different future. This is not to say that literacy is not essential to full societal participation or that literacy does not enhance access to information or the development of critical analysis. Rather, it is to argue that the understandings and discourses of and practices toward literacy in the United States are complexly interwined with the social dynamics and structural inequities of this society. This relationship is further revealed in the definitional conception that guides most public school and adult literacy instruction.

Within educational institutions, literacy is most often thought of as the "basic", specific, hierarchical, controlled, and measurable skills associated with reading and writing. It is perceived as a singular entity, i.e., literacy not literacies, and as a have or have not condition. To be literate means that one is both educated and educable (Cook-Gumperz, 1986), able to utilize the cognitive higher order skills associated with <u>real</u> (academic) learning. As Ferdman (1990) points out:

> Given broad cultural consensus on the definition of literacy, alternative constructions are either remote or invisible, and so literacy becomes a seemingly self-evident personal attribute that is either present or absent. In such an environment, literacy is experienced as a characteristic inherent in the individual. Once a person acquires the requisite skills, she also acquires the quality of mind known as literacy, together with the right to be labeled a literate person. (p.186)

Although recent research has shown literacy to be complex, pluralistic, socially, culturally, and contextually bound, interactive, and process rather than product oriented in nature (e.g., Brice-Heath, 1987; Cook-Gumperz, 1986; Ferdman, 1990; Scribner, 1986), public schools continue to operate on the belief that literacy develops from the bottom up in small incremental steps, that it is academic, that is, school rather than community based or oriented, monolinguistic (developed in one language at a time), and that it can be assessed through quantifiable measures. From where does this understanding derive? Is it solely pedagogical? Or is it also shaped by ideological concerns that extend beyond classrooms?

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Walsh, 1991b), the understandings of and approaches to literacy in schools appear to be tied, in large part, to "beliefs and assumptions about the nature of knowledge, of people (i.e., teachers and students), and of experience and to the relations of power and of social and cultural control which these beliefs and assumptions both construct and incorporate" (p.9). The orientation that underlies most traditional educational programs, for instance, overwhelmingly derives from a positivistic conception of knowledge, a rationality that situates both knowledge and literacy as separate from learners and from their (and their communities') actions, histories, experiences, and lived social, cultural, and linguistic realities. In this sense, knowledge is considered neutral, universal, verifiable information that must be formally acquired and taught. The acquisition or "learning" of knowledge is treated as deductive

and deterministic; instruction breaks "it" down into discrete, decontextualized pieces that are systemically fed to students by transmission-oriented and task-directed instructors. As a result, the teachers and students held captive within this positivist rationality come to be seen as the objects of knowledge, unable to act with or upon it. Further, the acts of teaching and learning come to be stabilized through measurable productivity while teacher and student agency (that is, their capacity to act in and on their environments), creativity, and difference are discounted. Ignored are the enigmatic processes involved in how one comes to know as well as how one comes to relate knowledge to practical, human purposes.

Although positivist pedagogies limit the possibilities of all students, they are particularly problematic for those whose lived experience and cultural frames of reference fall outside the boundaries of the universal image. In other words, while such instructional approaches tout knowledge as neutral, they tend to verify, legitimize, and reinforce the language and literacy related experiences, the community "social funds" of knowledge (Moll, 1989), and the cultural capital of the white (mostly male), English-speaking, middle classes. It is this prerequisite knowledge that is positioned as the desired, universal "standard" (e.g., Hirsch, 1987; Bloom, 1987).1 Consequently, class, racial/ethnic, and gender stratifications are exacerbated; access to literacy development and knowledge production is mediated through unequal power relations. This happens even in bilingual programs. Students' native language may be intermittently used but this use is seen by

teachers and students as remedial in that it transitions into the English standard. Biliteracy is neither a goal nor an accepted medium. Furthermore, curriculum and texts (regardless of the language they are written in) corroborate a homogeneity that denies the realities of urban life for bilingual communities.

The recent interest in whole language approaches to literacy instruction in elementary schools and problem posing, Freirian type-approaches at the adult level have helped introduce new understandings of the ways literacy develops and students learn. Moreover, it has challenged the effectiveness of methodologies that derive from a positivist orientation. In high schools, however, the mainstream, traditional methods are still reified; administrators and teachers generally remain stalwart in their goals and structure and are the most resistant to change and innovation.

For the past five years, I have been actively involved in trying to promote change at City High School. While I remain an outsider to the City school district in that I am not their employee, my role as an educational expert appointed in a legal consent decree between the school system and Latino parents affords me some authority within the system. As might be expected, however, this role also engenders some tension. A large part of my involvement has been focused on addressing the high dropout rate and suspension of Latino students at City High and in trying to initiate policy changes and pedagogical improvements. One aspect of this work has included a several year effort to institute a program within the bilingual program - a program that would specifically address the biliteracy needs of students and valorize and build

upon the experiences and knowledge that the students bring with them. While such a program began on a pilot basis during the 1989-1990 school year (the "advanced basic skills" classroom referred to earlier) and is being further developed this year (1990-91), administrators in the school along with some teachers remain opposed to its presence and to its pedagogical purpose and orientation. Their complaints range from the teacher's untraditional approach, classroom management and organization, and noise level to the problematic nature of the student population and the negative image that they give to the school. One administrator made clear to me his intention in a conversation during Fall 1990:

> I am fed up with that class and with the teacher...She has the students sitting in a circle instead of rows, that leads to disrespect, a lack of focus, and confusion...The [monolingual, Anglo, male] teachers on either side come to me all the time about the noise, it seems like all the kids are ever doing is talking...you, know, all at once. There is no teacher control, they are not learning anything...I want her out...The kids are the main ones that cause problems in this school. This program, I don't thinks its any good. Maybe you should put it somewhere else. If it were up to me, I'd just get rid of it.

The guidance counselor also contends that the program does not belong in an "academic" high school; "the kids would be better off getting their GED or in a vocational setting," she said. In contrast, the students view the program as their last chance to survive high school. As one student explained,

> We know they don't want us. They don't want us to learn... Here in this class we are learning. It's different, not like the classes before. Sometimes its hard because we don't have just one book, we don't just copy, we have to think different and more. But now I see that we're together here, like family...I am me...we share and sometimes we don't agree...For the first time, I feel like I know something, that what I think matters...Now I think maybe I can stick it out and get a diploma. (Translation mine)

These administrators' and student's words make real the tensions, conficts, and possibilities that surround literacy development and instruction for adolescents and young adults in many public high schools, not just City High. They point to the difficulties in getting urban secondary schools to accept that (1)an increasing number of their incoming students may not speak English or be literate in any language and yet are intelligent human beings, (2)the present conditions of public schooling help place these students "at further risk", and (3)the dominant understandings of and approaches to classroom organization, instructional content, pedagogy, and teacher/student and student/student relations need to be reexamined.

Critical Pedagogy, [Bi]literacy Development, and Student Engagement

The African American, feminist writer Bell Hooks maintains that,

> Students also suffer, as many of us who teach do, from a crisis of meaning, unsure about what has value in life, unsure even about whether it is important to stay alive. They long for a context where their subjective needs can be integrated with study, where the primary focus is a broader spectrum of ideas and modes of inquiry, in short, a dialectical context where there is serious and rigorous critical exchange. (Hooks, 1989, p.51)

It was promoting this critical exchange and encouraging a connection between lived experience and "academic" learning that was to be the focus of my work with the "advanced basic skills" students. In fact, the teacher had already begun to craft this pedagogical orientation when she and the students invited me in the Spring of 1990 to work with them on a classroom project that would address the theme: "a dropout comes back to school".

The students' initial desire was to develop a sociodrama --a dramatization of a plausible (but fictional) social situation -- and film it on video. Because I had worked on such a project with some of the same students two years before, the students were familiar with and aware of the effectiveness of both the method and the medium. For many, sociodrama was recognized for its ability to enable students to depict and recount the stuggles, conflicts, and meaningful issues of their lives without having to personally reveal themselves. Students were also intrigued with having their images and words recorded on camera. While I respected their wishes, my interest was to move beyond what had already been done and to present us all with a new challenge. I was interested in encouraging the students to make a connection between oral communication and print, a difficult task since most had very limited literacy skills and had demonstrated a resistance to any school task that required writing. My intent was to help create a purposeful, meaningful, and collaborative context for literacy development in the classroom, one that would engage students in collectively constructing text, in discussing, analyzing, and critiquing the context, language (i.e., varieties, dimensions, linguistic and grammatical forms) that would go into the text, and in assuming the role and responsibility of authorship. I wanted the students to move from thinking of themselves as objects to being subjects (since in my mind this is a key aspect of the literacy process). I also wanted the students to begin to understand the complex, tenuous, and often contradictory relationships with and among language, literacy, schooling, and lived experience. This

entailed encouraging students to talk, to theorize, and to write (in any and all languages and varieties) about the contexts, contents, and meanings of their lives in and out of school and to critically explore both their subjective positions and the existing and often conflicting discourses within these contexts.

The visual medium that I had in mind to ground the process and afford a purposeful context was that of a photonovel -- a comicbook-like format with photographs rather than caricatures. I talked with students about collectively constructing a sociodrama, a story about a student that dropped out of school and decided to come back, drawing pictures to initially represent the characters, actions, and contexts that went with the words, and then eventually staging photographs to provide the real-to-life images for the real-to-life dialogue. In this talk, my focus was on the creation of the story and its visual display rather than on the task of writing per se. After considerable discussion and questions, there was consensus.

The production of the photonovel occurred over the period of approximately three months during which time I spent one or two periods a week offerring feedback and technical assistance. Students and teacher continued to work on the project during other periods. While there are numerous aspects of this process, of students' engagement, and of their emergent biliteracy that I could analyze and discuss, I will focus here on only several.

Theme Dynamics and Language and Literacy Status

The first aspect is that of the underlying sigificance of students' choice of the theme in terms of their own subjective positions. This is important because it reveals much about how students individually perceive themselves, their social relations, and their language, literacy, and academic status within the school and the classroom. It also suggests how some of these perceptions are constructed and illustrates how these perceptions can structure what goes on in the classroom in terms of interactions, engagement, language use, [bi]literacy learning, knowledge production, and instruction. The initial interest in "a dropout comes back to school" was stimulated by discussions students had had both among themselves and with the teacher about two peers who had left school and were considering returning. Both of these peers had actually "illegally" shown up in school on a couple of occasions, coming to this class because of the widely held respect among Latino "at risk" students for this particular teacher. Their presence engendered both dialogue and speculation about why they had left, about the tensions in pondering whether or not to return, and about the disparities between the worlds of school and community. Although they never came out and actually said it, many of the students alluded to their own proximity to this reality. They had also been overtly reminded of this proximity by a letter the bilingual program administration wrote to the parents of these students earlier in the year stating that because of their low achievement they had been placed in "advanced basic skill" classes. The letter began: "Dear Parent of a Potential Dropout." It was handed as an open sheet of paper to each student in the class to

bring home to their parents. All of the students were both angered and taken aback by this direct naming of their status. However, for the newly arrived students, many of whom had high aspirations for school and life success in the United States, the letter also produced confusion about their present circumstance and their future.

Because of different subjective experiences, the significance of the dropout theme to individuals varied. For example, a few of the students had critically explored the dropout theme in the production of the previously mentioned video, some had also had been in the city or other U.S. schools for a number of years and were bilingual. As compared to the more recent arrivals, they demonstrated a more tacit awareness of the attitudes towards Latinos in general and the low literate/"at risk" Latinos in particular. They talked about feeling like they were being pushed out of school. And, because of their proficiency in English, they also understood the often derogatory comments of some white teachers and the school administration. Their resistance to this oppressive reality was made evident in numerous ways (e.g, see Walsh, 1991a) as was the administration's attempts to break them. These students hovered alarmingly close to the school border; the ingrained belief that a diploma would lead to economic success (despite the fact that reading and writing abilities in either language were very limited) seemed to be the only determinant for staying. In contrast, the Spanish dominant, fairly recent arrivals tended to blame themselves and the conditions of their lives (e.g., limited formal schooling in the native country, frequent

absenteeism due to job and family responsibilities) for their "potential drop out status". They still had the hope of learning (a hope many of the others seemed to have lost) yet encountered teachers and curriculum unwilling and unable to appropriately address the literacy development they required.

Chris Weedon (1987) maintains that the ways people make sense of their lives is a necessary starting point for understanding how power relations structure society. As she explains,

> How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent. (Weedon, 1987, p.26)

Because of their subjective positions in the school, classroom and community, students in the class had differential access to the discourses that surrounded and situated dropping out, being "at risk", and limited in school-based literacy. Consequently, their understandings of themselves as well as their understandings of one another differed greatly. The more recently arrived, Spanish dominant students viewed those bilingual ones who had been in the system, accustomed to urban life, and overtly resistant as "los tigres", the street-wise, tough kids who provoked problems and would be better off out-of-school or, at the very least, out of their classroom. In contrast, the designated "tigres" perceived those newly arrived who had come from rural areas as "los jibaros del campo," the backward peasants from the countryside. They chastised and taunted them (often times in English) for their lack of formal schooling, their passivity, dress, their regional varieties of Spanish, and their inability to employ the strategies

of codeswitching that they considered as indicative of status and group identification. The other students in the class who fell somewhere in between these two designated groups, aspired towards acceptance by the latter and, as a result, also actively put down the former. While the literacy abilities of all were limited, the more recently arrived group was also perceived as the "brutos", the dumb ones who were non-English speaking, illiterate, and less intelligent. It seems that the discourse used by the school administration to describe the entire class had been appropriated by some to position and exert power over the others.

What is particularly interesting is the role language and literacy assumed in these group dynamics. Bilingualism, that is, the ability to switch into English at will or to insert English words and phrases at opportune moments, helped define status. In fact, status within the group seemed to be proportionately associated with English ability. Thus, while Spanish was the dominant language of the entire group, those with the greater English ability -- the most bilingual -- clearly had higher status and more power within the classroom. They also considered themselves to be superior. Although the more recently arrived Spanish speaking students complained about the bilinguals' self-positioning, they frequently tried to emulate them.

Biliteracy similarly assumed a significance within these power relations. Although the bilingual students displayed major difficulties in reading and writing in both languages, they contended that they could read and write, it was just that they did not want to. Because they had been in U.S. schools for awhile and

had learned some English, most could in fact write some English words. As with oral language, this ability served to differentially position them in relation to the more recent arrivals who could neither speak nor write English and who were more open about both their inabilities and their desire to learn.

The differential understandings of the material social relations and the subjective positionings in the classroom were further illuminated in the students' choice of the main character for the photonovel. Initially, there were numerous suggestions. Yet, no one accepted their nomination. Criteria was also discussed but none could be agreed upon. Finally, one of the rural, more recently arrived group put forth the name of Julian (a pseudonym), a fellow group member. Julian beamed with pride. At first, "los tigres" argued that there was no way he could assume the role because he lacked the finesse in dress, style, and identity that was required. But when no one else was willing to take the lead, they and their allies began to joke about letting Julian make a fool of himself; by their talk it became clear that none wanted to assume the dropout identity for fear of exposing (either to their peers or to themselves) their own proximity. However, there was still an uneasiness in permitting Julian to do so. One student's words serve as an example:

> Let him play the jerk, what do we care. He's dumb enough that he doesn't know better. I don't want everybody to think that's me. You know I'd look good...but that isn't me...But nobody is going to believe the story with him in it either. (Translation mine)

The significance underlying the theme and students' struggle over its meaning and physical depiction is illustrative in that it provides a window into the competing social realities and complex power relations that are too often ignored or glossed over in discussions of literacy, language, and pedagogy. Thus, while bilingualism and biliteracy may be our ultimate goal for the students with whom we work, we must be cognizant of the divergent and often conflicting meanings, interpretations, experiences, identities, and subjective positions that shape and situate students' linguistic, cultural, and social relationships, alliances, status, and groupings within schools, classrooms, and communities as well as the ways these environments impact language, literacy, and pedagogical possibilities.

The Tensions of Lived Experience and the Power of Collaboration

A second aspect of the photonovel process that I want to discuss is how through theme-related dialogue and collaborative writing, students' began to explore their understandings of the "at risk"/dropout condition. As they began to uncover the power relations at work in the school and how they were differentially affected, the role and function of literacy began to take on new meaning.

The initial context of the photonovel dialogue that the students collectively developed and collaboratively wrote focused on the character of Julian, specifically his decision to leave school, his economic and familial responsibilities, his search for employment, and the low wages and heavy physical labor that went with the job he found and that led to a reconsideration of his

dropout decision.2 (Since Spanish was the dominant language of the class, this dialogue was conducted primarily in Spanish.) It was in discussing how to document and portray Julian's thought about returning, that the tone and substance of students' dialogue and discussion about Julian's lived reality shifted. As a group, the students began to critically explore the reasons why Julian left school to begin with and what might have to change in terms of both him and the school if he were to return.

In students' brainstorming at the outset of the project, they identified two major reasons for Julian's leaving: the treatment inside school and the need for money. The issue of treatment led to discussions about and elaborations on Julian's inappropriate behavior, his problems with teachers, and the suspensions and disciplinary actions that were the result.3 There was consensus that Julian was individually at fault; mention of the school standards, policies, and practices that determine what is appropriate behavior and what is not was absent. Similarly, when we began to discuss Julian's possible return to school, most of the students argued that <u>he</u> would have to change. In their cooperative, working teams, some began to write about what this change meant. Here are two examples:

insert example one about here

(well he has to change behave good in the school and not be disrespectful to the teacher and not skip class attend all class and not to go nobody with hat to the school)

insert example two about here

As someone with no formal administrative, instructional, or student status in the school, I began to question students as to the rules they were required to follow, asking what these rules were, where they were documented, who had made them, how they were instituted and maintained, and who controlled them. These questions promoted a dialogue that went on for weeks and that led to students eventually studying the code of discipline, discussing why rules were necessary, what rules were fair and what were unfair, and actually rewriting it. However, before reading and working on the actual code, the students began to raise questions about the ways some students were treated as compared to others and to critically examine the differential ways the school rules were carried out. One working team decided to document their thoughts and discussion for possible use later:

NO TODAS LASLeLLes son jUSTAS LA de -
La school.
becose is De MaCiADO estrictas.
sifueran mas mo de rada los muchachos
no se pu si e ran de revelde.
con los maes tros y los prinsiPALes,
ni LOS CON sejeros.
las lelles que ellos tienen SON mui fuerts
solo con los is pano.
Ricky piens A que si las lelles son
cun p lidas los muchachos Ispanos
las cunpliRAN. LLA que
quieren ponel Las Lelles A LOS
ispano SOLAMENTES
y LAR gunos gringo ((NO))

Not all the school laws are just
because is overly strict.
if [they were] more moderate the students
wouldn't be rebellious.
with the teachers and the principals,
nor with the counselors.
the laws that they have are very strong
only with the Hispanics.
Ricky thinks that if the laws were
carried out [with everybody] the Hispanic kids
would fulfill them. It's that
they want to put the laws just to the Hispanics
and to the gringos ((NO))
(translation mine)

There is much that could be analyzed in these students' composition. Certainly issues of syntax, morphology, semantics, and textual organization could be examined as could the students' strategies for word and syllable emphasis, their regional variety of spoken Spanish, their association of oral language and script, and their occasional use of English. Instead, I would like to briefly focus here on why this text is significant in terms of students' collaboration, their [bi]literacy development, knowledge production, and their understanding of the subjectivities, conflicting discourses, and power relations that surrounded them.

The student who actually wrote the text was one of the more recently arrived, rural, Dominican students. His [mutally chosen] team member who was Puerto Rican had had more time in the U.S. and more experience with the English language. However, as the only Puerto Rican actively involved in the project, his identity in the class was fragile. Both students had told me at the start of the project that they could not write. Indeed, their participation in the actual writing of the dialogue of the photonovel had, up until this time, been very limited. They also had not been particularly vocal about their own opinions with regard to school rules during dialogues in class. Both their production of this piece, its impassioned tone, and their explicit collaboration therefore surprised me.

The purpose of the text was, as these two students explained, "para recordar" [to remember] what they as well as alot of the students in the class thought about the fact that Latinos were always being suspended. (Sixty-four percent of the bilingual program Latinos in this school were suspended the previous year.) They said that it might be of possible use at some later point in the project. For them, the text represented oral speech written down; capitalization offerred a way to remember the emphasis they put on particular words when they said it aloud and the intermix of English is as it was spoken.

Writing gave these students a voice; it came to afford a function that, at least in the context of something truely meaningful to them, the students had probably not had the opportunity to previously consider. Furthermore, it offerred an

outlet to express their awareness and understanding of and anger about the unequal power relations and conflicting discourses in the school and, in so doing, gave the photonovel more authentic and personal significance. It also helped explain and give meaning to some of their peers' disruptive and resistant behavior. When they read it back to the entire class, the other students affirmed the two students' literary as well as subjective positions both by agreeing with what they had wrote and by reacting with further discussion and personal applications. In the next class, the students embarked on an active, emotional dialogue about if and how they could change the reality and conditions. They endeavored to tackle, in a sense, the fundamental poststructural question of "how and where knowledge is produced and by whom, and of what counts as knowledge" (Weedon, 1987: 7). It was at this point that they expressed a desire to read the code of discipline, examine the rules that they were most often suspended for, and possibly rework those that seemed inappropriate or irrelevant. They talked to me and to the teacher about if and how their suggestions could be given to the administration. They also conversed amongst themselves about whether the adults in the building should not also have to abide by the rules and discussed how student review boards might be a way to intervene before sending students to the vice principal. This process demonstrated alternative forms of knowledge production that led to a realization for many that the established discourses, meanings, relations, and conditions for Latinos in the school did not necessarily have to be taken for granted. Reading and writing became the tools that assisted them in their work and analysis.

While they occasionally needed technical assistance from us adults in the class, they had clearly determined the project and taken ownership. Its significance was recognized when, at the end of the school year, they presented the new code along with the photonovel to the superintendent, his assistant, and to one of the school vice-principals. The administrators listened to the students give an overview of both in Spanish and to the teacher's translation. Although some of the students could have made the presentation in English, the group decided that it was their context to control; Spanish was the language of the meeting and non-Spanish speaking guests were required to communicate through the designated translator (i.e., the teacher). They asked numerous questions about students' opinions of their schooling and respectfully waited for the Spanish transmission and the translation into English of students' responses. This was the first time the students had had such control (linguistically, socially, and intellectually); it was also the first time these administrators had shown an intense interest in what these students' were saying. The administrators voiced a commitment to consider the suggestions presented and in September, some were actually implemented.

Coming to Authorship

The third aspect of the photonovel process that I briefly want to mention is the students' coming to and assumption of authorship. As I mentioned earlier, none of the students at the outset of the project enjoyed, felt competent in, or saw the purpose of writing. Reading was also perceived as a teacher-directed task that seemed alien in purpose and, because of their [actual and perceived]

abilities, labor intensive and devoid of meaning. The context and content of the returning dropout theme, the medium of the photonovel, and the participatory and critical nature of the pedagogy seemed to together afford a space, a reason, and a place for students' perspectives, experiences, and understandings to emerge, for further investigation and interrogation to occur, and for this all to be documented so that others could read it and so that it would be "remembered."4

The teacher, who is a recognized adult, biliteracy specialist, saw this assumption of the role of authors as tied to an increase in students' control over and understanding of the writing process. In contrast to the remedial, skills-type approaches these students had been exposed to in other classrooms, she viewed the photonovel methodology, particularly its use of visual images, as enabling students to become writers. As she explained:

> it helped students not just write words but use the skills of more critical analysis - the use of visual images provides a context that helps students detect where details are lacking in the story and to elaborate. It provides contextual cues that enable them to reflect, judge, and to assess their writing.

The students' collective assumption of the author role became particularly evident in the final stages of the project. As the end of the school year neared, there were three things that still had to be done before we could send the books to be printed: a clear display of the text (handprinted or typed), editing, and layout. The teacher and I discussed these needs and the short amount of time left with the students and asked them how they thought we should proceed and whether they wanted us to assume any or all of the responsibilities. They felt these tasks were theirs to do and

requested that we only provide the technical assistance. They divided themselves into three groups: the computer, word processing team some of whom had never used computers), an editorial board, and a layout crew. The teacher provided the technical help to the first team while I offerred assistance to the latter. We worked collectively for seven hours non-stop on two consecutive days to complete the project. Students who I had been told by others in the building had an attention span of about 15 minutes, did not even want to break for a lunch period.

While both the teacher and I were pleased that the students' themselves had taken control of the photonovel's completion, we were hesitant about letting them assume the editorial function. We wondered, as teachers often do, whether we should correct spelling and grammar. What would it mean (for us, for the student-authors, and for potential readers) if the text was not "standard"? After much deliberation, we shared this concern with the students. They reminded us the text was theirs, that they appreciated our concern but that the decision, responsibility, and authority was with the editorial board they had designated. As adults and as educators, we had to let go; the students themselves had taken literacy, knowledge, and pedagogy and ran with it.5

On the last day of school, we organized a "book party" for the the students in the class and for their invited friends. (The above mentioned administrators, the bilingual guidance counselor, and the bilingual director were also invited after the students were each formally presented with their copies). The students (all dressed up for the occasion) gave speeches about what the project and the

final publication of the book meant. Pride was evident in their bodily stance, in their words, tears, and in their friend's respect and admiration. While each testimony was equally poignant, I especially recall the whispered words to me of the lone Salvadoran student in the class whose engagement in the project was quiet but constant.

> Soy autor. I am an author! You know, my family, they laughed when I told them I was writing a book. They said I was making it up. You know, I only went to the the first and part of the second grade in El Salvador. Now I can show them that it is true, my name is here, soy autor. I even want to send a copy to my relatives back home, they'll be surprised...they'll see, I'm an author, I still have a lot to learn but I've made it.
> (Translation mine)

Conclusions

This chapter offerred a glimpse into the dynamics, tensions, and possibilities that surround biliteracy development and knowledge production for linguistic minority adolescents and young adults in U.S. public schools. In contrast to many adult education contexts, these students are surrounded by the conceptions, orientations, and relations of an "academic" setting that has little or no use for lived experience, linguistic and cultural difference, or for students who do not measure up to the age-specific "standards" of literate and intellectual performance. Within this context, knowledge is wielded as distinct from and outside the realm of the real world and the community; instruction only serves to emphasize what students do not know. Literacy learning, if it occurs at all, is most often dependent upon individual will and/or a singular teacher's interest and dedication rather than on a focused program and pedagogy for action.

My discussion of the photonovel project and the students' construction of popular text affords one example of the learning and engagement that can occur when the traditional pedagogy and curriculum that places students with limited formal schooling "at risk" is challenged. It points to the need to build upon the experiences, concerns, and perspectives of students and to make these experiences, concerns, and perspectives the base from which literacy learning and knowledge production can emerge. It also demonstrates the potential that a more critical pedagogy can offer in terms of repositioning marginalized students as knowers and as teachers, rethinking the content, context, and social character of classroom instruction, and encouraging critique, engagement, responsibility, community, and a questioning of the status quo.

Finally, the chapter helps make evident the complex significance of language and literacy, and the conditions, relationships and practices that surround their use and development. In so doing, it demonstrates that bilingualism and biliteracy are more than just taught and learned communicative forms, they are dynamic, complicated, political relations that, as a result of context, intentionality, and the competing tensions that surround one's place within both the immediate and the broader social order, are in a constant state of shift, conflict, growth, and change.

Notes

1. I recently witnessed this "in action" in a classroom of what was referred to as "advanced basic skill" (i.e., limited literacy/"at risk") students. A [white ethnic] school administrator had

voluntarily assumed a mentor role with the group of mostly males because of their high risk status in the building. Why this involvement initially consisted of focused discussion and group counseling (and an effort to establish alliances based on his own non-English upbringing), it shifted at one point to "what the students should know," based on E.D. Hirsch's standards for "cultural literacy." The students' lack of knowledge and disinterest in the majority of items on the list was met by the administrator with alarm and dismay. He could not understand how students had reached high school without this "knowledge"; certainly success in the United Stated required that this knowledge be taught and learned (in the school if not at home) and its inherent values internalized.

2. This development and writing was done in small working groups of two or three, thus encouraging students' to dialogue about meaning, word use, and to alleviate the individual burden of syntactical and morphological form and composition. The products of these groups were then shared with the entire class. While suggestions and recomendations were elicited, the final decision on content and form was left up to the original authors.

3. The purpose of this initial brainstorming was to encourage a dialogue about the conditions of Julian's (and their) life that could eventually lead to the development of a story. Because students were wary about having to write, the first couple of weeks were spent with them talking and me informally recording their comments so that we would remember. The visual format that I used to do this recording on the blackboard was a problem-posing tree; at the base of the tree trunk were the two identified reasons for his leaving and below we identified the "roots", the problems, concerns, issues, and situations that prompted his leaving. The branches of the tree became the problems, issues, and circumstances that were created because of the leaving. The tree strategy provided a visual, graphic, and contextual way to represent the class discussions that made sense even to those students who had difficulty reading the actual words the tree included. In some instances, to make the tree even more comprehensible, I made a small drawing to represent the thought and to accompany the word or words that I wrote.

4. This documentation was done first in Spanish since this was the dominant language of most in the class (including the teacher). A small group of bilingual students worked on the English version at the same time, drawing from the Spanish text but adding their own understandings and interpretations.

5. The students' decision to edit the photonovel neither reflected an unawareness about their own limited abilities nor of the role of importance of the "standard", grammatically correct form. In the final composition of the new code of discipline, for instance,

students requested that the teacher do the final editing. They knew that because it was to be given to administrators, it should be in the "correct" and appropriate form. The photonovel, in contrast, had a very different audience and purpose.

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Sounds Like

1. _____

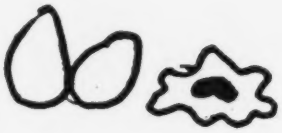
2 _____

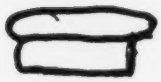
3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

A. 

B. 

C.

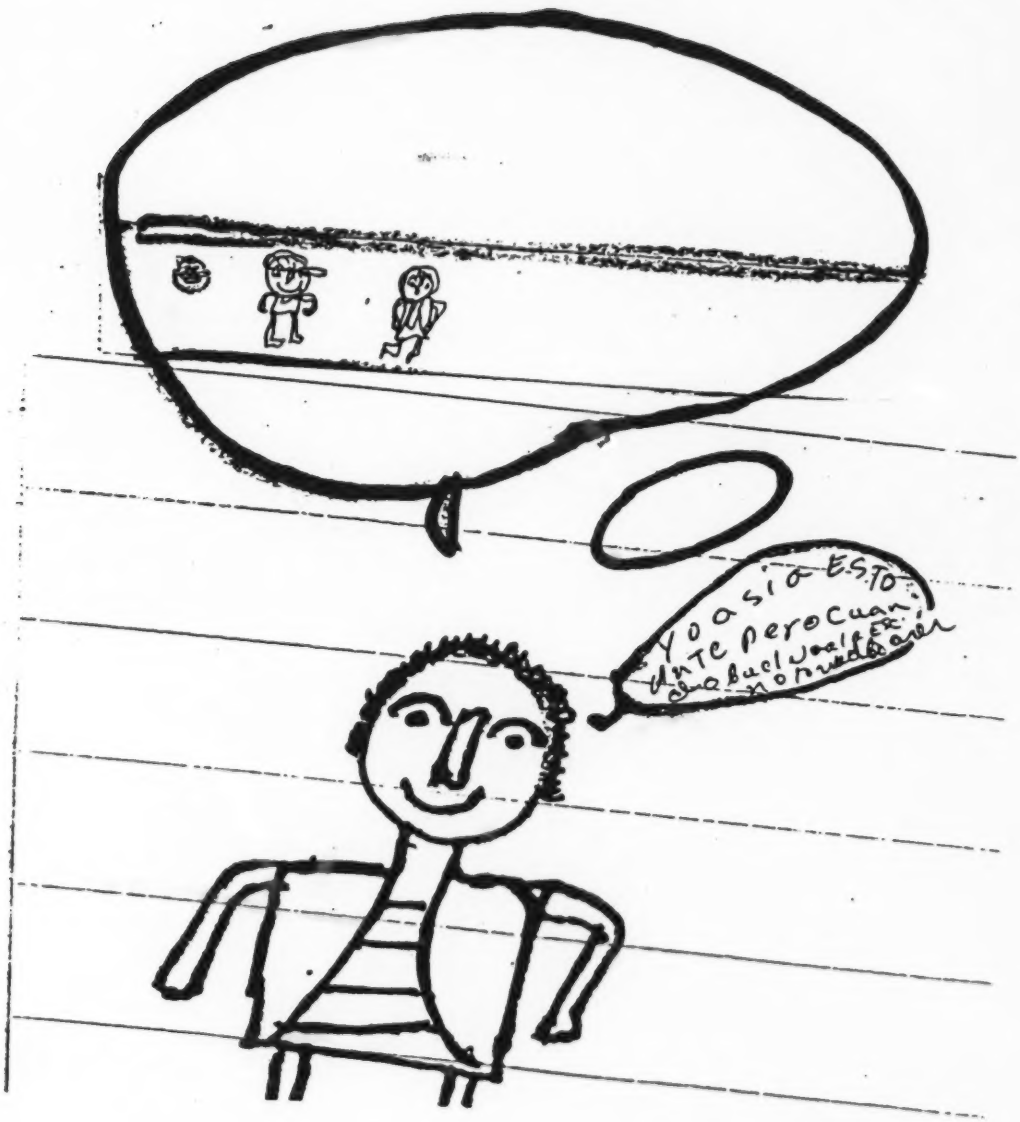
D.

E

F.

bueno el Tiene que
Cambiar portarse
bien en la escuela
y no faltar el Repeto
alo profesore yno
equipiar la clase
asitir aTodala clase
yno ir na dil congo
Tra ala Escuela

I did this before but when I return to school I am not going to do it



JULIAN'S REGRETS

((The story of a teenager))

AUTHORS

Joel Gonzalez
Rafael Mendez

JULIAN'S

REGRETS

The story of a teenager

AUTHORS

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LYNN ENGLISH HIGH SCHOOL

JUNE 1990

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thanks to a grant from the Polaroid
foundation to META Inc.

Prologue

The development of this photonovel was part of a project to explore and document the tensions and conditions that contribute to the high dropout rate among the Latino students in the bilingual program in Lynn, Massachusetts. As the students express in the text, many have adult responsibilities that the school fails to recognize and take into consideration.

The photonovel's theme "a dropout returns to school" was chosen by the students. Under my direction and that of the teacher, Ms. Rosario Gomez-Sanford, the students collaboratively worked to develop and write the story, type it in the computer, design the context and content of the photo shots, make the final editorial decisions, and do the layout. (The text was initially composed in Spanish; the students listed as authors here contributed to the translation and adaptation of the English version.) This is their work; it reflects their understanding of real life, the need for the school to adapt to the present reality of many students and the importance of thinking before acting. As part of the process, the students studied the code of discipline presently in place. They collectively discussed and agreed upon how it should be adapted, rewrote it, and presented it to the superintendent and the school administration. Their purpose was to attempt to create a discipline code that was more fair and equitable and realistic, a discipline code that would help maintain order and promote a good education and that would not push them out of school.

Hopefully this work will serve as an important and powerful example of students' perspectives and thoughts, as well as of the possibilities inherent in a more relevant curriculum and the need for school change.

Catherine Walsh
University of Massachusetts
Multifunctional Resource Center
for Language and Culture in Education

During the school year of 1989, 64% of the Latino students in the bilingual program at English High School were suspended.

This year, 13% of the Latino students in the bilingual program at Lynn English dropped out of school.

This book is dedicated to them.

INTRODUCTION

This book is about a young man who decides not to go back to school. But because life is very hard outside school and on the streets, for all those circumstances, he decides to go back to school.

The circumstances will appear in the following pages, and I hope you enjoy them.

The young man quit school due to pressure from supervisors, principal and teachers at school.

Another reason for students dropping out of school is their disagreement with the code of discipline in the school. They do not agree with temporary suspensions, often unjustified.

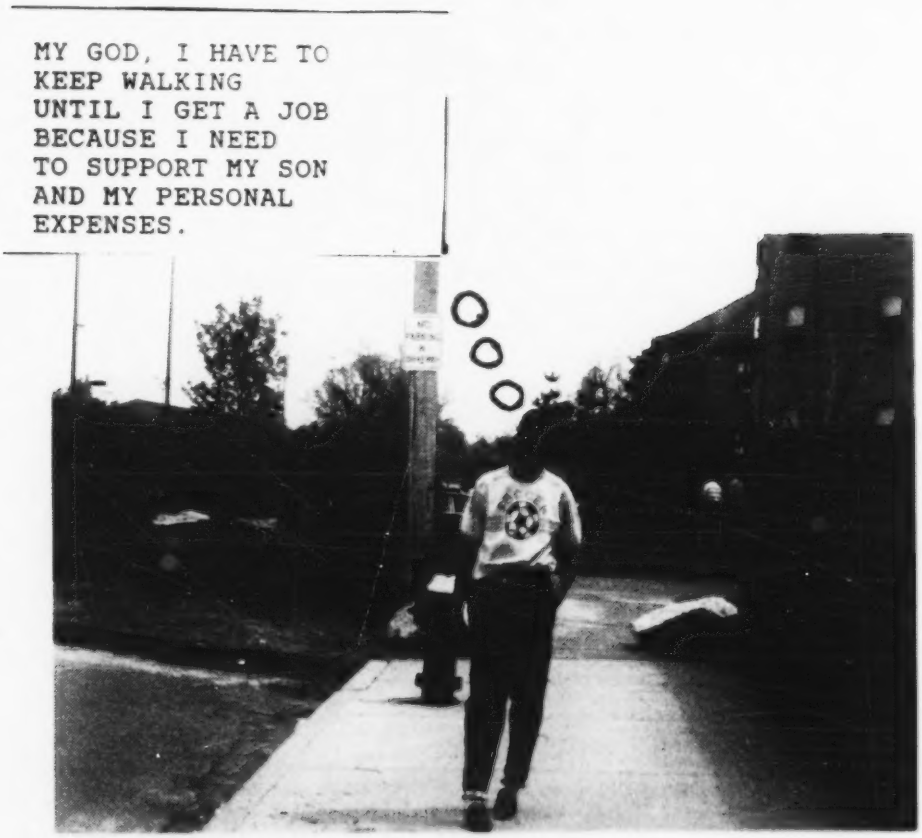
CHARACTERS

JOSE.....RICKY RODRIGUEZ
JULIAN.....AMILCAR MATOS
LILIN.....CARMEN AGUIAR
MANUEL.....HECTOR FLORIAN
MAURICIO.....JOSE HERNANDEZ
VICE PRINCIPAL.....V.P. CURTIS

INVITED ACTORS

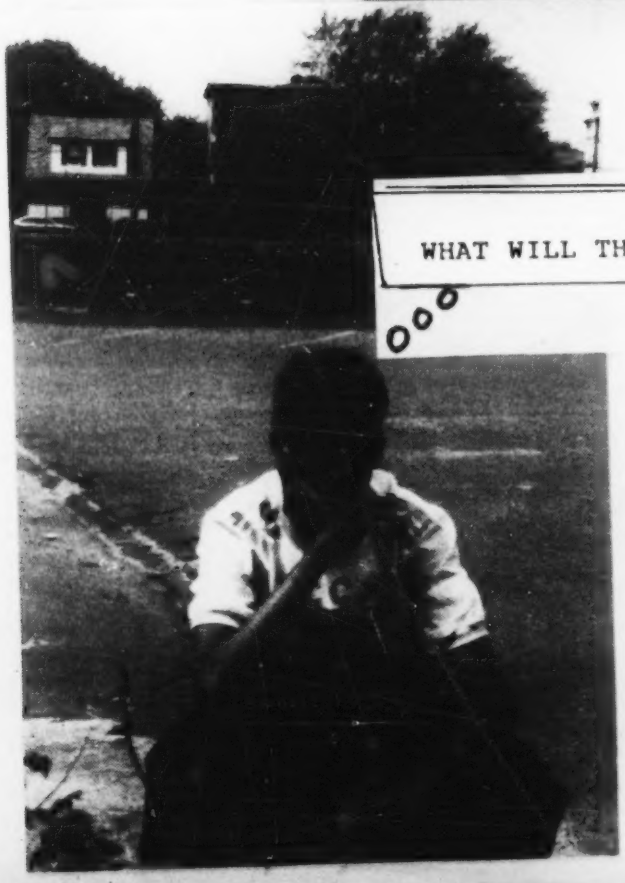
LEONEL ALCANTARA
RAFAEL MENDEZ
DANIEL GONZALEZ
EVELIN MARTINEZ
WANDA ACEVEDO
JUAN CARLOS RODRIGUEZ

I DON'T LIKE SCHOOL
I'M LEAVING DEFINITLY
THE SCHOOL

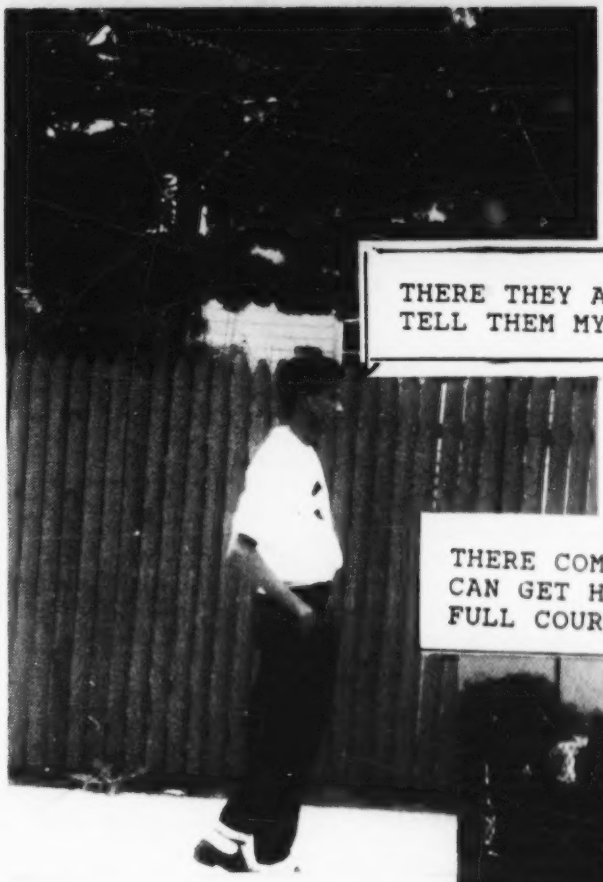

MY GOD, I HAVE TO KEEP WALKING UNTIL I GET A JOB BECAUSE I NEED TO SUPPORT MY SON AND MY PERSONAL EXPENSES.

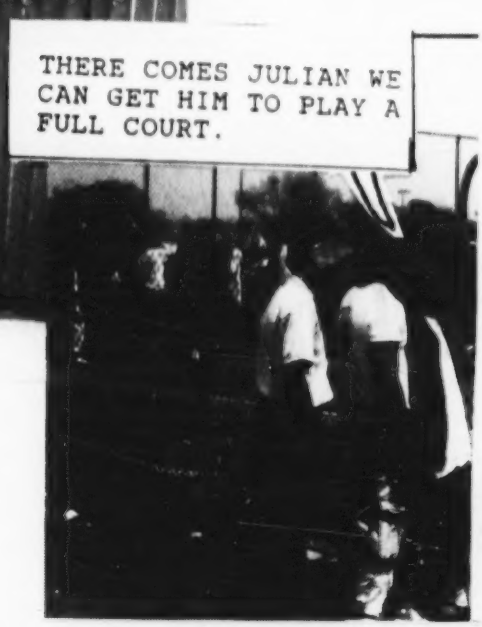
WELL I THINK MY FRIENDS CAN HELP ME.

WILL THEY HELP ME YES OR NO? YES, THEY WILL



WHAT WILL THEY ASK IN RETURN?


THERE THEY ARE I'M GOING TO TELL THEM MY PROBLEM

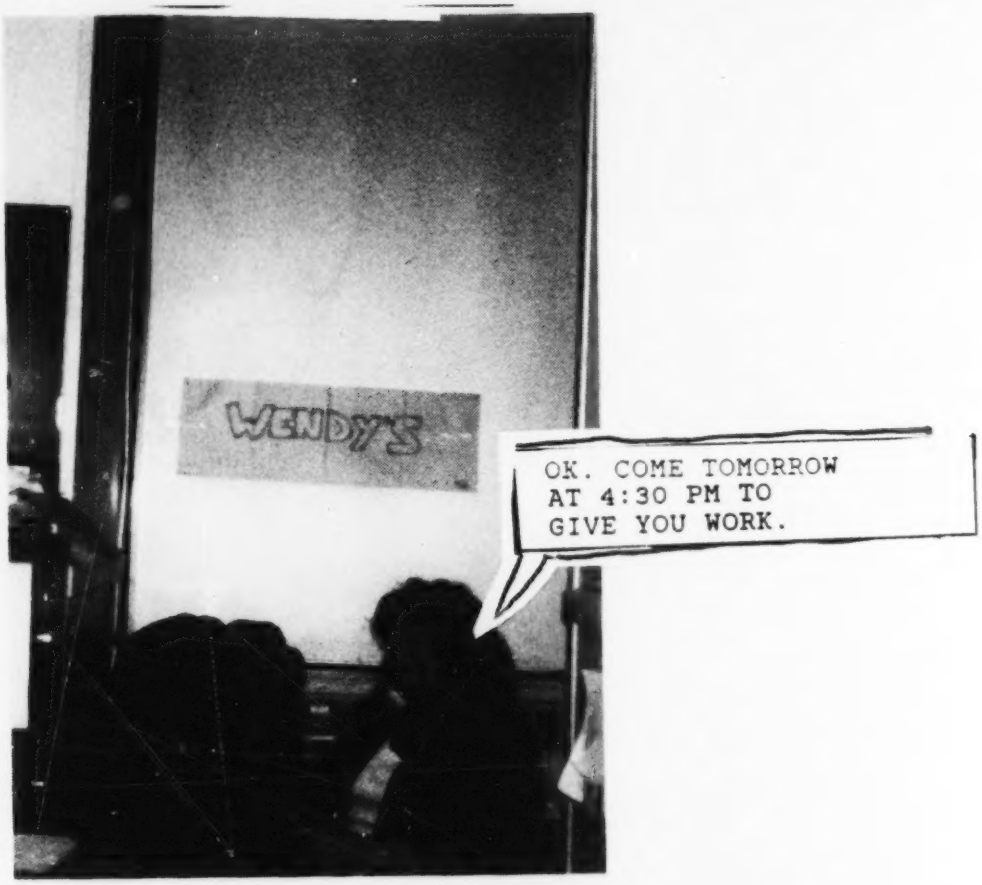

THERE COMES JULIAN WE CAN GET HIM TO PLAY A FULL COURT.

HEY FOLKS, I HAVE TO TALK TO YOU GUYS.

O.K. JULIAN AFTER THE GAME

HEY FELLOWS I DECIDED
TO NOT COME
IN TO SCHOOL NO MORE
BUT I HAVE TO GET A
JOB BECAUSE
I HAVE A SON AND THAT'S
A BIG RESPONSIBILITY

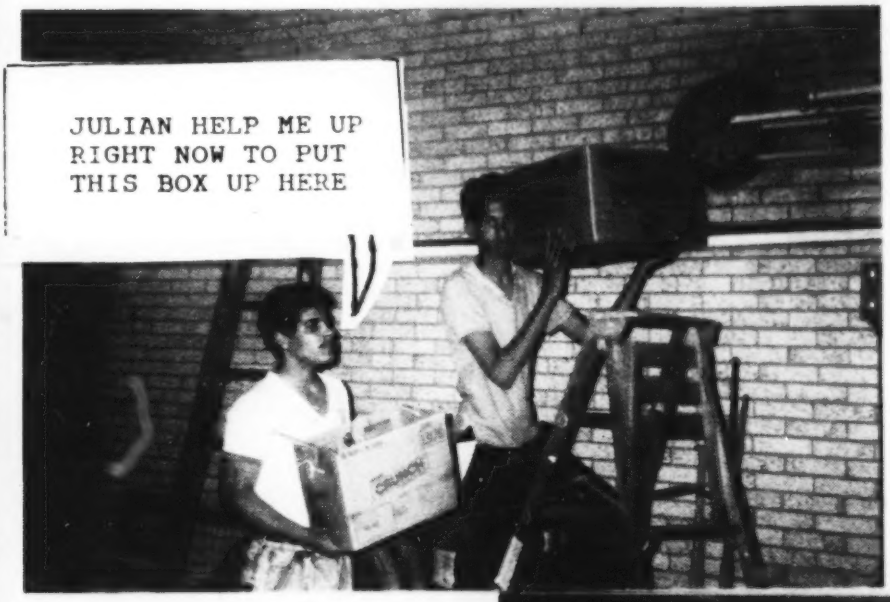
JULIAN CALLS LOOKING FOR A JOB



NEXT DAY...

HOW MUCH DO YOU PAY AN HOUR?
WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
HOW OLD ARE YOU?
ARE YOU INTERESTED ON THE JOB?
O.K. I'LL TAKE THE JOB
WE PAY $5.00 DOLLAR AN HOUR.

COME, JULIAN DO THE WORK QUICK BECAUSE IF YOU DON'T, YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE PROBLEMS. HELP ME TO PUT THE TRASH OUT.
THERE IS JULIAN WORKING BUT HE IS NOT FEELING VERY HAPPY.


JULIAN HELP ME UP RIGHT NOW TO PUT THIS BOX UP HERE

GOOD WE ALMOST FINISH WITH ALL THE BOXES.
THAT'S GOOD BECAUSE I'M VERY TIRED
THERE IS IAN WORKING V HARD.

I DON'T LIKE THIS JOB.
IT IS TOO CHEAP AND
I CAN'T AFFORD ANYTHING
I PREFER TO GO BACK
TO SCHOOL.

JULIAN GETS OUT OF WORK.

I DON'T WANT YOU TO BE
THE SAME AS ME
I WANT YOU TO TAKE THE
SCHOOL IN SERIOUS
WHEN YOU HAVE 4 YEARS OLD
AND START TO STUDY THAT'S
THE FIRST THING I ASK YOU
TO DO. I DON'T WANT YOU
TO TAKE THE SAME WAY THAT
I TOOK. GOD BLESS YOU.

I WILL GO TO WORK.
I AM LATE FOR WORK.
BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT
TO STUDY, I'M
WORKING AT A RESTAURANT.
I'M WORKING IN
THE KITCHEN.
IF I HADN'T LEFT SCHOOL,
I COULD HAVE BEEN
SOMEBODY IMPORTANT IN
MY LIFE. THEN I
COULD BE A LAWYER AND
NOT A BOSS IN
THIS KITCHEN.

LATER...

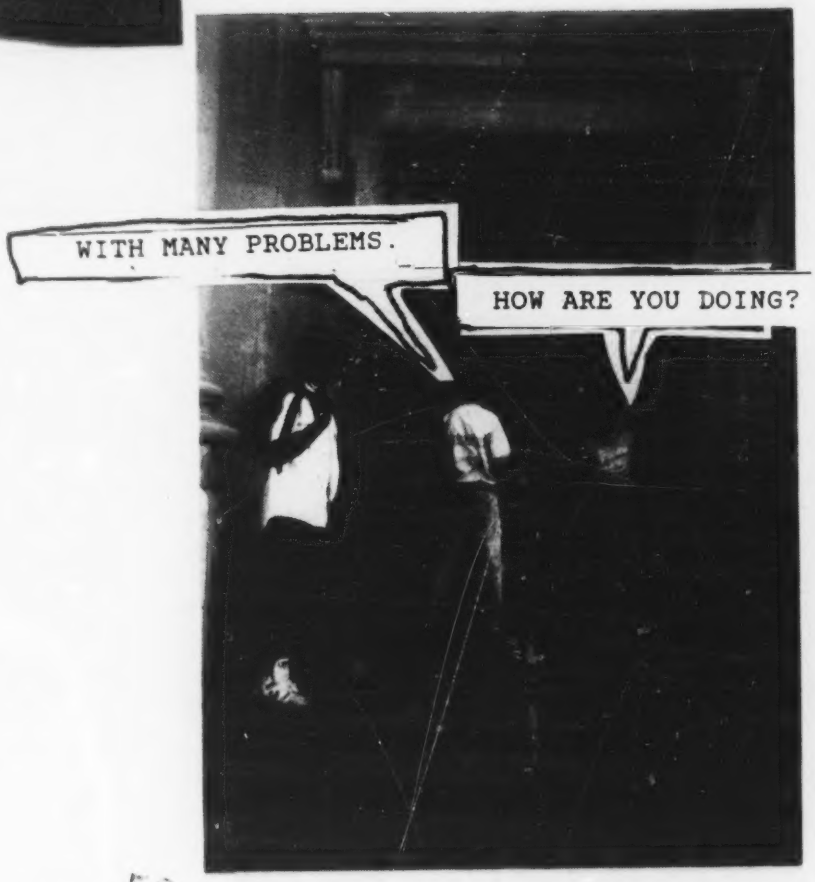
A DAY LATER...

I WAS WORKING FOR YOU AND MY CHILD AND YOU WERE CHEATING ON ME. I CAN'T TAKE IT.

SHE LIED TO ME. I DIDN'T KNOW SHE WAS MARRIED.

YOU ARE NO ONE TO TELL ME ANYTHING BECAUSE YOU COULDN'T UNDERSTAND ME I HAVE STOPPED LOVING YOU

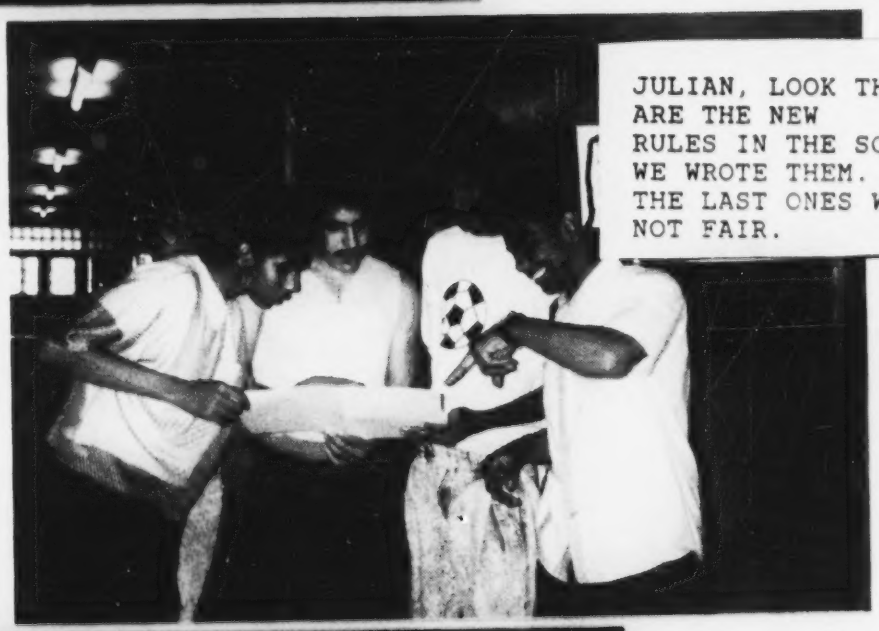
LET ME GO. MANUEL WAS WITH MY WOMAN.
CALM DOWN, JULIAN. WOMEN LIKE THOSE ARE NOT REALLY WORTH IT.


WITH MANY PROBLEMS.
HOW ARE YOU DOING?

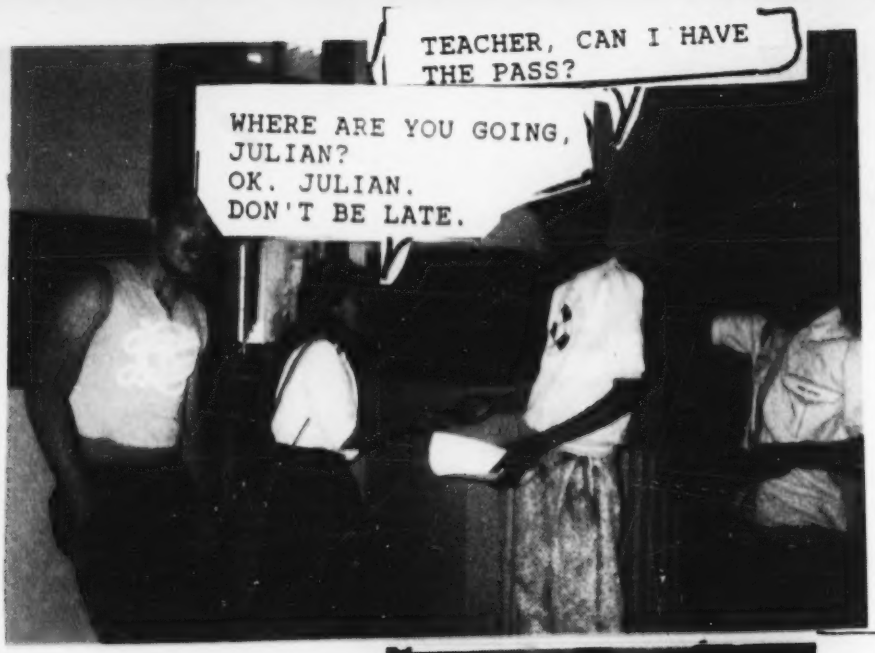
WHERE'S JULIAN?
I HOPE HE IS NOT
LOOKING
FOR TROUBLE.

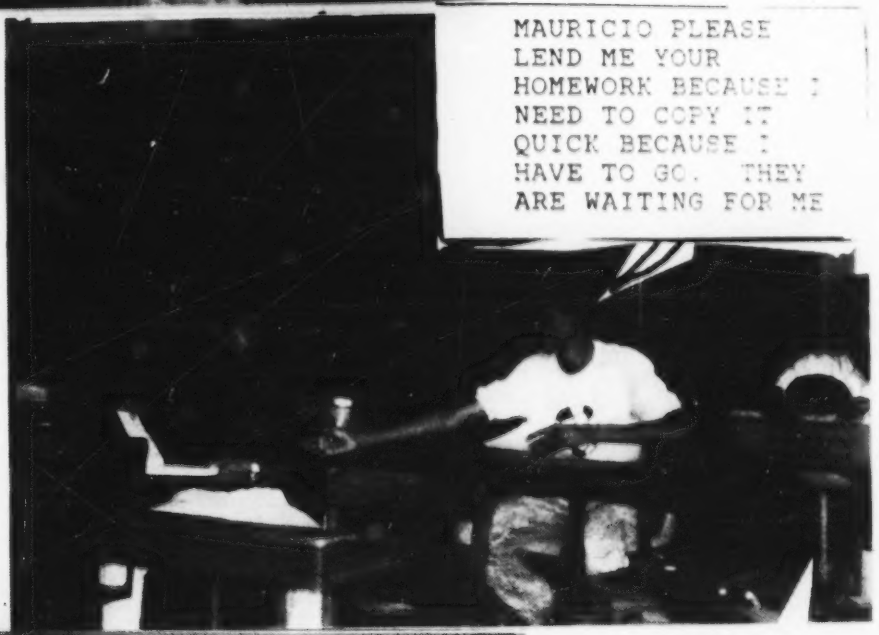
AY, I DIDN'T KNOW
JULIAN WAS BACK

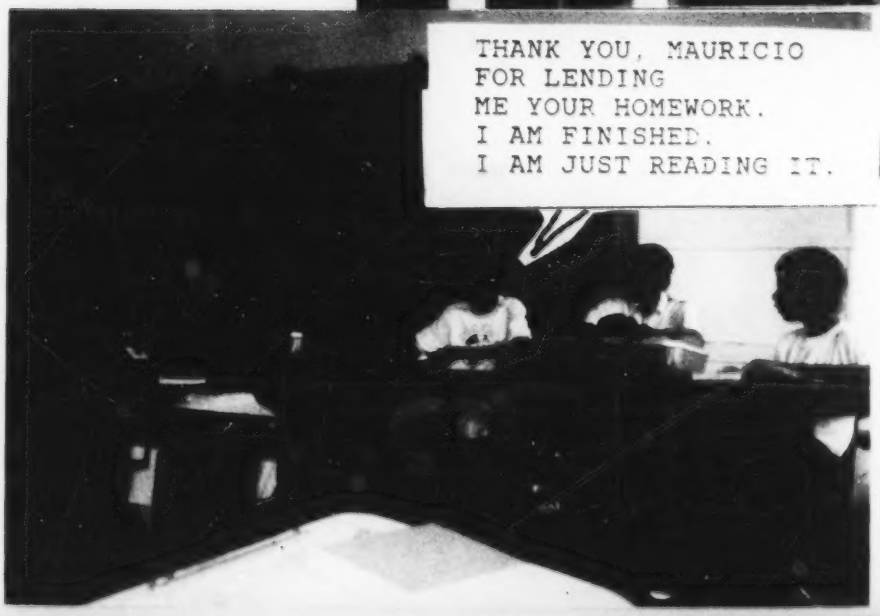
THIS IS THE NEW
CODE OF DISCIPLINE
TO BE FOLLOWED,
MR. PRINCIPAL.
WE WROTE IT.

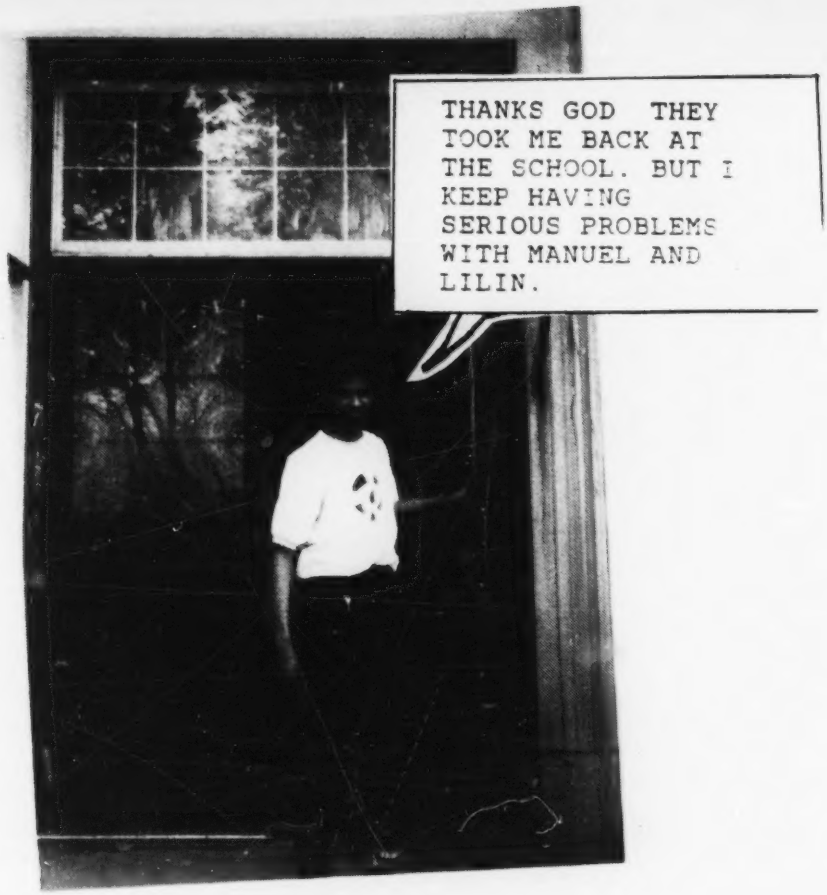

JULIAN, LOOK THESE
ARE THE NEW
RULES IN THE SCHOOL.
WE WROTE THEM.
THE LAST ONES WERE
NOT FAIR.

CODIGO
DE
DISCIPLINA


TEACHER, CAN I HAVE THE PASS?
WHERE ARE YOU GOING, JULIAN?
OK. JULIAN. DON'T BE LATE.


MAURICIO PLEASE LEND ME YOUR HOMEWORK BECAUSE I NEED TO COPY IT QUICK BECAUSE I HAVE TO GO. THEY ARE WAITING FOR ME


THANK YOU, MAURICIO FOR LENDING ME YOUR HOMEWORK. I AM FINISHED. I AM JUST READING IT.



THANKS GOD THEY TOOK ME BACK AT THE SCHOOL. BUT I KEEP HAVING SERIOUS PROBLEMS WITH MANUEL AND LILIN.

THINKING IS WORTH LITTLE
AND FEW CAN THINK,
THINK WELL AND YOU
WILL SUCCEED
THINK BEFORE YOU ACT
AND YOU WILL ACCOMPLISH
SUCCESS.

AN ADVICE FOR THOSE WHO THINK ABOUT QUITTING SCHOOL

If you think about quitting school, don't do it. You'll be a loser if you do it. You should go to college and study for a profession. The work that you do will pay benefits and salary. Remember the people with more studies get the better pay.

If you are thinking about quitting school get some advice from your family and friends.